075234 - Hansen Dam Recreational Development, CA

Contributed by Edward Louie
Wednesday, 11 January 2006

04/28/04 - REMEDIATION OF HANSEN DAM LOWER LAKE FILL SITES (2.0MB PDF)

12/12/03 - Updated Information:
In FY 2002 the Corps removed approximately 1,650 cubic yards (CY) of construction debris and approximately 2,200 CY of native soil during the repair and reconstruction of the swim lake at Hansen Dam. The Corps placed this material near the northwestern edge of the Large Lower Lake. During this same time period, the Corps placed approximately 1,200 CY of chipped and mulched giant reed (Arundo donax) mixed with soil in the Small Lower Lake, and an additional 100 CY of the same material in stockpiles along the northern embankment of the Small Lower Lake. The original purpose of the fill at both lakes was to improve safety at an “attractive nuisance” area. The Corps’ Operations Branch prepared a Categorical Exclusion document for filling the borrow-pit lakes as well as for an annual lakeside Arundo management plan, and the Corps had plans to manage the Lower Lakes area as seasonal wetland. The Administrative Supplemental Environmental Assessment, Repair of Hansen Dam Swim Lake (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 2002) covered the disposal of the concrete lining the 1.5-acre swim lake, and estimated that approximately 3,500 cy of associated clean fill would be placed into the Large Lower Lake. The purpose of that fill was to supplement the fill addressed in the Categorical Exclusion. The Corps made no further discharges of fill and does not plan to fill the lakes.

Fill material in the Large Lower Lake consisted of approximately 1,650 CY of construction debris comprised mostly of crushed concrete excavated during reconstruction of the swim lake. The construction debris also contains a small quantity of rebar. An additional 2,200 CY of native soil, also excavated from beneath the swim lake, was used to cover the construction debris. The majority of this fill material is below the water surface, with the exception of a small stockpile of native soil near the northwestern edge of the lake. As part of the proposed rehabilitation the Corps would restore the 150 feet (ft.) length of shoreline that was originally disturbed at the Large Lower Lake. Limited quantities of concrete rubble, including some attached rebar, mixed with native soil would be removed as part of the restoration. Any excavated material would be disposed of at upland sites, outside of waters of the United States. Construction debris would be disposed of at existing landfill and/or recycling facilities. In addition, the natural substrate along with a portion of the clean fill material would be recontoured to restore the natural shoreline. The recountouring operation will result in some associated incidental fill in the Large Lower Lake.

Fill material in the Small Lower Lake consisted of approximately 1,300 CY of chipped and mulched giant reed (Arundo donax) mixed with soil, and a small amount of litter refuse from the soil. Of this 1,300 CY, 1,200 CY was placed in the lake. The additional 100 CY was placed in several stockpiles along the northern embankment of the lake, and has subsequently been removed. Approximately 900 CY of this fill material originated at Sepulveda Dam, and the remaining 400 CY originated at Whittier Narrows Dam, from flood channel clearing activities.

In 2003, SOTA Environmental Technology, Inc. (SOTA) analyzed one sample of fill material from the stockpile on the shore of the Small Lower Lake for physical components. By weight, the sample consisted of 92% soil, 7% Arundo, and 1% trash (glass, plastics, and others). The presence of trash in the mixture was the result of litter from the flood control channels at Sepulveda Basin and Whittier Narrows mixed in with the giant reed and soil; the litter had been that were removed during the flood channel clearing activities that generated the fill material.

As part of the proposed rehabilitation, the Corps would focus on shoreline restoration, habitat restoration, lake management, removal of non-native vegetation, and other activities supporting shallow marsh/wetland formation. The Corps would remove any visible or above-surface debris in both lower lakes, including any protruding rebar in the Large Lower Lake that either poses a safety hazard or degrades the visual quality. At the Small Lower Lake, the Corps proposes to modify the steep banks along the approximately 70 feet of the shoreline that was originally disturbed. The shoreline rehabilitation activities will result in some associated incidental fill in the Small Lower Lake. The Corps expects the composition of the incidental fill material in the Small Lower Lake to consist of native soil with a small amount of previously disposed fill material, to be similar in composition to the sample described above. Limited quantities of the previously disposed fill material may be excavated as part of shoreline restoration, as well. Excavated material would be disposed of at an existing landfill or recycling facility.

11/14/03 - The Hansen Dam Lower Lakes Remediation Environmental Assessment and the related 404 documents are now available.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT for REHABILITATION of LOWER LAKE FILL SITES in HANSEN DAM FLOOD CONTROL BASIN (322KB Word File)

THE EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTS OF THE DISCHARGE OF DREDGED OR FILL MATERIAL INTO THE WATERS OF THE UNITED STATES 404(b)(1) EVALUATION FOR HANSEN DAM LOWER LAKES, HANSEN DAM FLOOD

CONTROL BASIN, LOS ANGELES (LAKEVIEW TERRACE) (57KB Word File)

THE EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED PLAN TO REMEDIATE THE DISCHARGE OF DREDGED OR FILL MATERIAL INTO THE WATERS OF THE UNITED STATES 404(b)(1) EVALUATION FOR HANSEN DAM LOWER LAKES SHORELINE REHABILITATION, HANSEN DAM FLOOD CONTROL BASIN LOS ANGELES (LAKEVIEW TERRACE) (62.5KB Word File)

10/1/03 - Site Assessment Report for the Lower Lakes at the Hansen Dam Flood Control Basin, Los Angeles, California

This Site Assessment (SA) (300KB PDF Document) summarizes the results of the December 2002 through March 2003 lake water, sediment, and soil sampling activities that occurred at the Lower Lakes, Hansen Dam Flood Control Basin (FCB), California. This report evaluates the nature of contamination present in and near the Large and Small Lower Lakes that may have resulted from the placement of material at those locations by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and potential adverse impacts to surface water, groundwater, and human health resulting from the placement of the material. The Site Assessment was conducted under contract with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Los Angeles District.

ANALYTICAL DATA (Files are in Microsoft© EXCEL™):
Table 1
Table 2
Table 3
Table 4
Table 5

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: There are currently three issues of concern associated with Hansen Dam: flood protection, preservation of the ecosystem within the basin and recreational opportunities.

The flood control purpose of the dam and basin is to control the flow of the Little and Big Tujunga Washes downstream into the Los Angeles River. Improvements to the downstream channel provide the system with a higher than original discharge capacity, and excavation within the basin has increased its acre-foot capacity over its original construction. These two factors ensure that the dam meets or exceeds its designed flood control capabilities.

To identify concerns and develop solutions to help preserve the basin’s ecosystem and the availability of recreational opportunities within the basin, representatives from the Corps meet regularly with the community, interest groups, elected representatives and other responsible agencies.

By applying proven engineering principles, working closely with the stakeholders identified above and adhering to regulatory guidance and applicable laws, the Corps will seek the most beneficial combination of these sometimes-conflicting goals.

Important Information:

Hansen Dam and its basin form a major portion of the Los Angeles County Drainage Area (LACDA) flood control project. Congress authorized the Hansen Dam portion of LACDA in 1936 after several disastrous floods damaged the region in the ‘30s. The Los Angeles District managed the construction of the dam from September 1939 to September 1940. The dam, whose purpose is to control the flow of water into the Basin from the Little and Big Tujunga Washes and eventually into the Los Angeles River, very likely prevented a similar disaster in 1943. The District continues to operate and maintain Hansen Dam and to manage the flood control requirements of the basin.

Over the years, Congress passed laws that authorized the Corps to build public recreational facilities around the dam. The City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks is the “local sponsor” in cost-sharing of recreation facilities, and is responsible in for maintaining and operating recreational facilities within the basin, if compatible with Corps’s flood control requirements. The City of Los Angeles leases 1,437 acres within the basin. The city’s Recreation and Parks Department operates several recreational facilities on the property, including a swim lake, a fishing lake and several soccer fields.

By 1953, Hansen Dam was one of the 10 most popular recreation areas in the country. Today those recreation activities remain the dam’s strongest attraction. Birders, equestrians, hikers, bikers, joggers, fishermen and swimmers capitalize on the Corps’ construction of wetlands, trails, lakes and other amenities. Soon they’ll be joined by hundreds of young soccer and softball players on fields now being proposed.

Inevitably, with so many thousands of stakeholders taking advantage of the area, conflicts arise. Sometimes conflicts among stakeholders themselves, sometimes with the Corps and with the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks. In keeping with Lt. Gen. Bob Flowers’ order “to build synergy through a broad-based dialogue,” the L.A. District participates in regular public meetings conducted by local residents. In this forum,

Corps team members listen and learn about the concerns and opinions of various stakeholders. The District has also participated in student tours of the area, as with Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams).

But the Corps and its projects represent all visitors —not just those in the immediate neighborhood of a project. Corps policies and practices must balance many competing interests while performing its twin missions of flood control and environmental preservation.

The Corps is redoubling its efforts to work with all stakeholders and asks those stakeholders to bear in mind both its authorizations and its constraints.

FAQs

Q. It appears deposits were placed in the mouth of Little Tujunga. Would that increase the flood hazard?

A. No. Any significant flooding would overwhelm such deposits. There would be no back flow concerns, since the flood control basin was designed expressly to receive and contain such flows and overflows.

Q. Has the flood control capacity of Hansen Dam diminished since its construction?

A. No. Hansen Dam provides greater flood control capacity now than it did upon its completion. Shortly after its construction, improvements to the downstream channel allowed the dam to have a greater discharge capacity, thereby removing the excess water more quickly from the basin and delivering to the ocean. In the 1990s, a contractor removed accumulations of sand and gravel to restore flood control storage capacity lost due to sediment buildup from the Big Tujunga and Little Tujunga Washes. The Los Angeles District monitors the basin to ensure that sediment and other deposits do not diminish the dam’s flood control capacity. Corps engineers estimate that Hansen Dam provides protection for a flood likely to occur less frequently than once in 300 years.

Q. What is the difference between the basin’s lakes and the “borrow pits” the Corps claims exist in the basin.

A. The excavations described above that were necessary to maintain the basin’s flood control capacity resulted in the creation of “borrow pits.” Over time the pits filled with water and took on the appearance of natural lakes. Currently, there are two such lakes; they contain fish, are surrounded by lush vegetation and have become vital resources for birds and other wildlife.

The lakes are fine for the animals and plants, but there were no safety precautions for human beings around these lakes. The Corps saw a possible threat to visitors and so deposited a relatively small amount of inert concrete and other clean fill in the larger lake; a small mat of non-viable vegetation was deposited in the smaller one. Corps studies had indicated minimal impact on the local environment from these deposits, and, in fact, that is what happened.

However, the Corps took these remedial steps without sufficient consultation with, and review by, the public. We regret this oversight. Since then, the Corps’ participation in public meetings designed to consult, listen and inform show our dedication to exploring mutually satisfactory ways to deal with the issues.

Q. Does Hansen Dam still provide its designed flood control capabilities?

A. Yes. The original discharge capacity of the dam—12,000 cubic feet per second—met the flood protection requirement. Improvements to the downstream channel completed in 1952 raised that discharge capacity to 22,000 cubic feet per second. That capability has been further enhanced by the Corps’ regular excavations of the flood control basin. Between 1985 and 1995, for example, the storage capacity of the dam was increased by nearly 5,000 acre feet to almost 31,000 acre feet. (An acre-foot is the volume of water that would cover one acre of land with one foot of water.) Excavations continued for four more years, through 1999, further increasing the basin’s storage capacity in case of a major flood.

In other words, the dam’s ability to protect hundreds of thousands of residents from destructive floods was continually being upgraded.

Those two Corps strategies—raising the dam’s capacity for both water discharge and water storage—have resulted in unprecedented flood protection for neighboring stakeholders. District engineers now estimate that the dam provides protection for a flood that would occur only once every 350 years—in other words, roughly a 3 in 1,000 chance of happening in any one year. Not perfect, but impressive protection.

Q. The Corps built a swimming pool at Hansen Dam. Doesn’t that violate the Corps’ authority?

A. No. Congress authorized the Hansen Dam swim lake though special legislation

(http://www.house.gov/berman/accomplishments.htm). The lake has some features in common with swimming pools because of stringent requirements from the Los Angeles County Health Department and the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, without which the lake could not be allowed. Increased costs for construction of the lake result from these additional requirements.

Q. Was the swim lake built on landfill, has it reduced flood storage capacity and is it subject to liquefaction?

A. No. The swim lake was constructed on a high terrace and did not adversely impact the basin’s flood storage capacity. The Corps looks at three factors relative to liquefaction: low density, high ground water and fine grain sand. None of these conditions exists at the swim lake site. All Corps flood control and recreation features are designed in consideration of the potential for major earthquakes within the vicinity.

Q. What is the Corps doing to improve communications and relations with residents and other Hansen Dam stakeholders?

A. The Corps meets regularly with community representatives, elected representatives, county and city agencies and other interested organizations and individuals who share a common interest in Hansen Dam and its environmental and recreational assets. The community-led forum addresses items of interest and concerns and attempts to develop effective solutions.

The District works closely with the Department of Recreation and Parks, residents and interest groups and the area’s elected representatives to ensure the public is kept informed of work and activities in the area and to solicit information and opinions from the public and others about activities and operations within the Hansen Dam area.

Stakeholders:

· Community
· Lake View Terrace Homeowners Association http://www.lakeviewterrace-hoa.org/
· Project Grad Los Angeles http://www.projectgradla.org/

· Government organizations
· City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks http://www.laparks.org/

· Elected representatives
· U.S. Rep. Howard L. Berman (CA-26)
http://www.house.gov/berman/
· State Senator Richard Alarcon http://democrats.sen.ca.gov/senator/alarcon/
· Los Angeles City Councilwoman Wendy Greuel (District 2) http://www.cityofla.org/council/cd2/
· Los Angeles City Councilman Alex Padilla (District 7) http://www.cityofla.org/council/cd7/

· Interest organizations
· San Fernando Valley Audubon Society, http://www.socalaudubon.org/sfvas/

Photos:

http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/resreg/images/hansend.jpg
http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/resreg/images/hnsn2.jpg
http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/resreg/images/hnsn3.jpg
http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/resreg/images/hnsn4.jpg

Public Opinions/Comments:

-----Original Message-----
From: Baumann,Debra A [mailto:Debra.A.Baumann@kp.org]
Sent: Monday, October 28, 2002 12:02 PM
To: 'publicaffairs-spl@spl01.usace.army.mil'
Subject: Community Commendation for a job well done at Hansen Dam by
Chief Safety Officer Susan Tianen

Subject:
Community Commendation for a job well done at Hansen Dam by Chief Safety Officer Susan Tianen

10/28/02

"Thank you!" for Susan Tianen, Chief Safety Officer.

Yesterday our community sponsored a horse ride through Hansen Dam, an area managed by the Army Corps which, as you may know, has been the subject of considerable public protest with regard to actions taken by the Army Corps as well as the LA Dept of Recreation and Parks, the flood basin's leasee. Susan Tianen joined us on this ride, and we are delighted to have an Army Corps contact who is intelligent and fun, very knowledgeable, an excellent communicator, and a skilled equestrian, to boot...!

So, please know that we are very happy with Susan Tianen, and grateful to her for taking the time to join us on this ride. With the involvement of people like her from the Corps, we look forward to accomplishing great things, hopefully making the Hansen Dam basin a positive model for how a large recreational area can meet multiple user needs without compromising either flood control or environmental issues.

Thank you again,
Deb Baumann

Contacts:

We welcome your thoughts and comments on these and any other issues related to Hansen Dam. Please remember that the City of Los Angeles, through its Recreation and Parks Dept., is the local sponsor responsible for many of the activities at Hansen Dam. We support our local partner in every possible way, but some of your questions and concerns could be addressed more productively with the City. Please contact us at the following e-mail address: PublicAffairs.SPL@spl01.usace.army.mil or you can telephone at 213-452-3908. We welcome your input and we look forward to cooperating with our stakeholders and customers.